

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Statement / Testimony

TESTIMONY OF ANTONIO DeVARGAS

Before the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

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THE FUNDING OF ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES AND THEIR IMPACT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Madam Chairman, members of the Committee, my name is Antonio DeVargas. I am the President of La Compania Ocho, a for-profit, minority owned business engaged in the logging and processing of timber, located in the small mountain village of Vallecitos, New Mexico. Unemployment in Vallecitos and the surrounding communities is more than 20k.

Madam Chairman, I thank you for holding this hearing today and am honored at the privilege of being invited to testify,

La Compania Ocho operates within the Carson National Forest. As a direct result of frivolous litigation brought by Forest Guardians, a Santa Fe-based, self-proclaimed "guardian" of the forests, La Compania has been severely crippled in its ability to work. Although the federal courts have consistently ruled in our favor, the delays created by Forest Guardians have had a devastating impact on La Compania Ocho and on the villages which surround Vallecitos. Forest Guardians has been able to pursue its vindictive and punishing litigation campaign because of the grants it, and its allies, have received from certain large foundations.

This campaign against our way of life and our efforts to create a local, sustainable economy has been based on half truths, distortion, and outright lies and has been propped up by the seemingly endless supply of money for litigation. Numerous foundations have been involved in supporting the campaign to destroy the Hispanic village lifestyle. For example, the PEW Charitable Trusts has funneled money to the New Mexico Audubon Society under the auspices that the money would be used to benefit the villages of northern New Mexico, including those in the Vallecitos area. In fact, those monies were used to try and destroy our villages. (see Attachments A and B.)

Foundation money has also been used to create "coalitions" the member groups of which are often like Potemkin villages - "organizations" consisting of only one or two people. The people involved have been able to successfully create the impression for their funding sources that they are mass organizations with large bases of support in the "coalitions." One example is a group called Carson Watch, based in Penasco,

New Mexico. (See Attachment C).

When I refer to the false information and distortion of the truth that are disseminated by these environmentalists I am referring to their "mantra" that the forest is being clear cut and that harvesting of timber exceeds the growth of the forest. As an example, I would like to present figures that are documented on a 73,000 acre tract of land in the Carson National Forest in the El Rito Ranger District. In 1986 our organization requested a site specific inventory in the Vallecitos area. This inventory revealed that this tract of land had 380 million board feet of timber; that the forest was growing at the rate of 12 million board feet per year; that nine million board feet could be harvested sustainably and the forest plan allowed for the harvest of 7.2 million board feet per year. Since 1994, less than four million has been harvested, and due to appeals and litigation brought by various environmental groups funded by organizations mentioned above, that figure has dropped to less than one million per year for the past three years. There has been no clear cutting of timber in this area in my memory or the memory of my parents or grandparents.

Another area in which the lies and misinformation are utilized is when the funding proposals assert that these groups work with local and indigenous communities. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, on the few occasions that they have engaged local villagers from affected communities, what they say that they plan to do is the exact opposite of their intentions, and the only reason these engagements even occur is so chat they can document that they did meet with the community. The fact that there was no consensus and that strong opposition to their plan was expressed is never documented in their proposals and so they present a very rosy picture that gives the "appearance,, of cooperation and collaboration with local villagers, but, in fact, was a manipulative ploy to misinform the funding source and the general public.

We, the people of New Mexico would like to see the United States Congress take swift and decisive action to put an end to this abuse of privilege, and restore our ability to create an economy based on access to the natural resources that are an integral part of our custom, culture, tradition, and right to the pursuit of happiness. Our commitment in response is to be good and responsible stewards who will make sure that our activities are sustainable environmentally, economically, culturally and in concert with the tenet of protecting our heritage for future generations.

Thank you again Madam Chairman for holding this hearing and affording me the privilege and honor of presenting my testimony on behalf of my company, my village, my County and the countless other rural people whose lives have been devastated by the abuse of the Endangered Species Act and other environmental laws that are well meaning but are being abused.

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